Effort & Energy (Retreat at Spirit Rock)

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One of my favorite parts of giving a dharma talk is sitting up here at the beginning, listening to all the sounds as people settle in—the rustles, the pops of chairs, the adjustments—and hearing it slowly settle. It brings a lot of delight to feel that settling happen.

Tonight the topic is effort and energy. In some ways this is connected to what we might call the art of meditation, because we all have to find our way to how we bring our effort and energy into the practice. The Buddha did offer us some guidelines and suggestions. In particular, he encouraged us to apply ourselves with wisdom and balance. So one of the things I'd like to explore at the beginning is: what is the wisdom that helps us in making effort?

In one of the Theravadan lists—the paramis, the ten perfections—we find a series of beautiful wholesome qualities that the Buddha is said to have cultivated in the many lives before he became the Buddha. In that sequence of ten beautiful qualities, wisdom and energy are positioned right in the middle. Wisdom directly precedes energy in that list, pointing to the way in which we need to have some kind of wisdom in how we use our energy in practice.

Energy itself is a neutral quality. It is the same kind of energy connected with anger, confusion, hatred, pride, greed, and irritation as it is with love, joy, kindness, and generosity. The Buddha really encouraged us to look at how we use that energy—to use it in ways that will help us become free.

Wisdom is really a foundation for us. It holds the first position in the Eightfold Path: wise view and wise intention. These first two factors highlight the importance of our perspective, of how we engage in the practice.

It's said that after his awakening, the Buddha reflected on the world and human beings and how they go about living their lives. He realized that while beings want to be happy and do things in order to find happiness, they are actually doing the very things that keep them stuck in struggle and suffering. Our usual worldview, in a simplified way, is something like: having things or being seen in a certain way will make me happy. And there is a measure of happiness when we get things we want, or people see us as we'd like, or we feel we can control what we're doing. But it is not reliable. Things are impermanent, and so having things is not a very reliable source of happiness.

We all know how our own minds change. Our views and opinions of other people are not very stable. To think that we can find our happiness in having other people's views and opinions be the way we want them to be—that's pretty unreliable. The Buddha recognized that the very way we go about our lives, we

are placing our faith in things that are not reliable. We're trying to find happiness by placing our faith and trust in things that are impermanent, unreliable, and out of our control.

In his own awakening, his first teaching was connected to this understanding of suffering—recognizing that suffering is created or caused by craving and clinging in the mind, and that it is possible to be free from that craving, leading to a release from suffering. There is a path to cultivate this direction. An understanding of suffering, an understanding of what takes us toward suffering and what takes us away from it, is foundational to what the Buddha taught.

This is a piece of wisdom. There are many different ways that wisdom is pointed to in the Buddhist teaching, but here is the one I'd like to look at: certain qualities and states of mind tend to head us in the direction of suffering, while other qualities tend to lead us away from suffering.

The Buddha pointed to unskillful, unwholesome states as those based in greed, aversion, and delusion. These are all the states that lead to reactivity in our minds. Anger, hatred, confusion, pride, irritation, depression, boredom—so many different states, hundreds probably of different reactive emotions. But they all have this thread back to being connected with greed, aversion, and delusion.

The understanding is that when we act, and that intention toward action is connected with greed, aversion, and delusion, that's what tends to head us toward suffering. But when we act with intention connected to wholesome states—states based in non-greed, non-aversion, non-delusion—we tend to head in the direction of freedom. It takes us on a different path. This includes love, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, concentration, mindfulness, generosity, wisdom, ethical conduct, and truthfulness—many wholesome qualities of mind. When we act from those qualities, we move toward liberation.

And so this understanding of what leads us to suffering and what leads us away from suffering is what the Buddha grounded his teaching on wise effort in. Wise effort really points to recognizing and cultivating those states that lead us away from suffering, and letting go of states that lead us towards suffering.

So let's start there in this reflection on effort and energy. The Eightfold Path includes wise effort as a whole path factor, and it has a very clear definition. I'll name it first: there are four kinds of wise effort. The effort towards the non-arising of unwholesome states that have not arisen. The effort towards the abandoning of unwholesome states that have arisen. The effort towards the arousing of wholesome states that have not arisen. And the effort towards the maintaining or sustaining of wholesome states that have arisen.

Now, these may sound a little convoluted, but they're actually not when we start to look at them. The first one—the effort towards the non-arising of unwholesome states that have not arisen—has three negatives in that sentence. How do we parse it? Basically, it's understanding, looking at our experience, using mindfulness, observing what happens, and recognizing causes and conditions that tend to lead us towards

suffering and struggle—and avoiding those causes. Another way to frame this first kind of effort is as avoiding unwholesome states.

The use of "avoiding" here, however—I mean, we have associations with that word, a relationship to it. And if we apply our usual relationship to avoiding to this path factor, we may find ourselves engaging in aversion towards unwholesome states. So I want to tease this apart. This is not about aversion to unwholesome states.

For instance, suppose you notice that every time you see a particular person, you feel agitation and reactivity. On the surface of it, you might think that avoiding the causes—looking at this in the big picture of what you're noticing right now, where seeing that person creates the conditions for being reactive—would mean you should avoid that person. We might think that's what is instructed here. There may be times when that is useful and skillful, a skillful means for finding a way to begin exploring what's going on in the mind with this particular situation.

But a deeper look reveals something important: fortunately for us, other people do not have the power to do anything to our minds. Seeing another person that we come into reactivity around—it's not as if that person is doing anything to us. There's something going on in our own minds. And I think what this teaching around avoiding the causes and conditions points to is beginning to get really curious about what's actually happening. What's going on in the mind? It's not just about seeing somebody, as if seeing them pushes some button that creates reactivity. There's a whole series of events that happen. Can we get curious about that?

Maybe that person has a gesture that reminds you of somebody who actually did you some harm in the past, and that gesture is what's leading to the reactivity. That gesture and that memory connection is what's creating the response. So we can explore the deeper conditions and begin to be curious about them. In this exploration, we might recognize that there's a thought that arises, and we can begin to decouple it from that particular person. It's not so much about them specifically. We see that it's more about the memory we're reacting to.

In this exploration, we discover that avoiding the state isn't so much about avoiding the person, but more about understanding the deeper reactivity. As we begin to meet in our minds with mindfulness the agitation that comes up as a result of a memory, a deeper kind of letting go begins to happen.

Here's another example, perhaps simpler in a way. You might notice that when you stand in the lunch line, when there are a lot of people around, you see yourself judging a lot. You notice people taking a lot of food or different kinds of food or filling their plate in a different way, and there's judgment: "Wow, they do it really beautifully. Look at how beautiful that plate is." Or, "They're taking too much or too little or just right," or "I'm not taking the right amount." Judgments arise.

Again, we might think that this teaching of avoiding the conditions that lead to judgment might mean

going late to the lunch line so we don't have to watch people put food on their plates. That would be one way to approach it. But we could bring more curiosity to what's going on there—just being curious about the judgment.

And also being curious about where the mind leaves, because when the mind goes into judging, the mind is leaving the present moment.

Joseph Goldstein noticed this. You're in good company if you find yourself judging when you walk into the dining room. As Joseph said, this was a major practice for him. And at some point he recognized that what he should do when he walked into the dining room is note "seeing." Because his mindfulness was going out the eye door. And when he started noting seeing, he just noticed movement. He noticed that he was present for the seeing as opposed to being caught by judging what he was seeing.

This is a really useful practice. This is a form of containing, of guarding the sense doors in a sense. So instead of guarding the sense doors by avoiding the line entirely, we guard the sense doors with mindfulness. That's a way to explore this—avoiding the arising of the reactivity.

The second effort is the effort to abandon or let go of unwholesome states that have arisen. The word "abandon" here has certain connotations for us. We think of abandoning often as actively putting aside, actively getting rid of. And there are times in our practice when a kind of active recognition is helpful—recognizing, "Wow, I'm really caught by this. It's not helpful to try to be with this right now." A kind of setting aside, a "not now" approach. A recognition that this is overwhelming. You can be here in the room with me, but I can't put attention on you right now, so I'm going to put attention on something else. That can be a skillful means. That's a way of decoupling from reactivity.

Or sometimes replacing reactivity. If we're noticing that we're reactive—judging someone or confused about something—the Buddha taught a tool: if we have some kind of reactivity going, we can pick up another thought, a wholesome thought, and replace it. Replace the unwholesome thought with a wholesome thought. So if there's anger, for instance, replacing it with a thought of mettā. If you see somebody and you have anger arising, a way to navigate that, to begin to let go or move away from it, might be to bring in a mettā thought. May you be happy. May you be at ease. These are ways to work with this form of wise effort to let go of unwholesome states that we're experiencing.

And yet another way of letting go has an association with a different definition of the word "abandon." I looked up the word at one point because the Buddha uses it in a couple of different places, and I thought—since it's translated as "abandoned," it's not what the Buddha actually used—but it's an interesting word. In some places it has what we might think of as a negative connotation, like abandoning a child, where we're doing something that's not so helpful. But in other places, like the phrase "abandon ship," there's a very natural movement of removing oneself from a place of danger. That's another use of that term—when we abandon ship, we're abandoning something that's dangerous.

That's the kind of sense I think the Buddha means when he says abandon unwholesome states. We begin to recognize the danger of these reactive states. Our mind and our mindfulness begins to recognize, "Oh, that hurts and it's not so helpful." And the mind begins to let it go, to abandon it because it understands the danger. This is wisdom that understands that danger. This kind of abandoning happens through our practice of mindfulness, as we explore what it means to be with, to let be, perhaps, reactive states of mind.

We're doing a lot of this in our practice. This is so much of our mindfulness practice. We notice the arising of confusion and hatred and boredom and craving, and we see what we can do to allow holding it in our mindfulness. This morning in the Q&A we talked about bowing to our difficulties—not being swept away by them, but opening to them, allowing them to be known with mindfulness.

That practice has a potency and a power. My understanding of how that works is that with mindfulness, as we're mindful of reactivity, as we're mindful of these unwholesome states, our mind gets an education. Often when we're caught by reactive states—if we're caught by greed for something, if we're caught by wanting something—our minds are projecting into the future. Our minds are saying, "It's going to be so great when I get that thing."

The mind gets caught in that fantasy of having something, and the fantasy itself is pleasant. So the mind is going for that idea of some future pleasant experience—it has created this pleasant fantasy. And in doing so, it basically misses the fact that the wanting itself, the craving itself, hurts.

When we turn with mindfulness to the craving, when we turn with mindfulness to the reactivity, we cannot avoid recognizing: wanting hurts. Anger hurts. This is dukkha. We recognize that. The mindfulness recognizes the suffering of it. And mindfulness and wisdom together begin to guide our minds in a different direction. Our minds have to get it that these reactive states are suffering. This is not a mistake—this is so much of how the practice unfolds.

Another beautiful line from Joseph, a great favorite of mine: we want insight into dukkha, into suffering, without experiencing suffering. And that isn't the way it works. The insight comes because we're willing to be with it, with wise effort, with wise mindfulness. And the understanding grows from that.

This kind of wise effort—the effort to abandon unwholesome states that have arisen—is a big part of our practice.

Then there is the effort to arouse or bring about wholesome states that have not yet arisen. We can do this in a couple of different ways. One is cultivating wholesome qualities through inclining the mind towards those qualities. We are doing that in the metta practice each day, in the brahma-vihara practice. That practice is a practice of cultivating wholesome mind states that have not yet arisen. It also serves the fourth wise effort of sustaining wholesome states that have arisen, because as the metta does begin to arise, the practice sustains it. We incline the mind through intention towards wholesome qualities.

Another way this effort works is by not engaging in actions or situations that directly oppose those

wholesome qualities of mind. Refraining from unwholesome actions cultivates wholesome mind states. This is one of the ways that working with the precepts works. In fact, in the Buddha's teachings around the precepts, he links each one with a wholesome quality. He says that abstaining from killing living beings begins to cultivate compassion in the mind. Abstaining from taking what is not given begins to cultivate contentment. The action of avoiding unwholesome action begins to cultivate wholesome mind states.

This is also a way we can see the first wise effort of avoiding unwholesome states that have not arisen, because the precepts work there too. They are about avoiding actions that tend to lead to unwholesome states of mind—refraining from killing, refraining from taking what's not given. So the precepts are functional in that first wise effort. They're also, at the very same time, cultivating the wholesome. What a great thing.

We also explore cultivating mindfulness, which, as my teacher Sayadaw U Pandita said, is the most wholesome mind state. Wise mindfulness, he said, is the most wholesome mind state. And that's a lot of what we're doing here too—we are cultivating mindfulness.

The fourth wise effort is the effort to sustain wholesome states that have arisen. When I thought about this one for myself, I wondered: why would that take work? Why would it take work to sustain something that is wholesome? Then I began to recognize two tendencies in the mind. One is that when something delightful or a wholesome state is arising—like joy or bliss or concentration—we can have a tendency to indulge in it. We can get lost in it and lose mindfulness. And as we lose mindfulness of these wholesome states, we lose the conditions that support their arising.

And so mindfulness of these wholesome states is one of the key ways to encourage their growth. It not only encourages sustaining them, but it also encourages them to arise more in the future. So again, mindfulness functions both in arousing wholesome states that have not arisen and in sustaining wholesome states that have arisen.

Indulging is one side of what our minds can do with wholesome states. And to my surprise, I also sometimes found that when wholesome states were strong, they could be overwhelming. At one point I was sitting and having breakfast, and I was experiencing a lot of joy arising. I was just noticing the joy, and it was pretty strong, pretty intense. And I was kind of like, "Whoa, I can't handle this." There was some trying to tamp down on it—resistance to the joy because it was so intense.

And then a little bit of wisdom flitted through, which said, "It's okay, it's impermanent. It won't last." With that, the mind let go of trying to repress it. And it got really strong. It was kind of like a wave—it broke. And then tranquility came in. It was like a beautiful, peaceful joy that followed. So mindfulness there was also the medicine. Non-resistance.

Recognizing the beautiful qualities that are being cultivated as we practice is important. Sometimes people, in hearing about wise effort, notice that there are times when we actually take action, and these

are skillful means. These tools of wise effort can be skillful means. There are definitely times when it's time to put something down, set it aside, say "not now." There are times when it's time to pick up the metta practice and actively cultivate it.

So the practice of wise effort can sound like a lot of doing. And yet what I want to also point to is that the practice of wise mindfulness—which is largely what we're exploring and cultivating here—is about inclining towards becoming present for what is arising. Sometimes people ask the question, "Well, we're practicing just looking at what's arising. How does that connect with wise effort? We're exploring settling back and just seeing what's coming." It can feel like there's a conflict there.

Well, as we practice wise mindfulness, wise mindfulness itself already contains the four wise efforts. Let's think through it for a moment. If you are exploring an unwholesome state—looking at the arising of anger, for instance, noticing anger, exploring mindfulness of that anger—that is that second kind of wise effort right there: the letting be, the exploring, the allowing wisdom to begin to support the letting go of an unwholesome state that has arisen.

And simultaneously, while that's happening, the mind is getting that education that "Wow, this anger hurts," which creates the conditions for anger to arise less in the future. That's the first kind of wise effort: cultivating the conditions for the non-arising of unwholesome states. As we open with mindfulness to our reactive states, it creates the conditions for them to weaken, for them to get less strong, for them to begin to appear less and less in our minds.

And then simultaneously with that, we're also cultivating mindfulness, which, as my teacher said, is the most wholesome mind state. So we're cultivating the arising of mindfulness—the third kind of wise effort. And at the same time, we are practicing sustaining mindfulness that has arisen—the fourth kind of wise effort.

So there is no conflict. As we practice noticing what's happening in our present moment experience with opening to it, we are already practicing the four wise efforts. And we find at times that we're not able to simply be with what's arising, and then it's useful to use some strategies, to bring in some other tools that help us let go of unwholesome states or cultivate wholesome states more actively.

This wise effort that we make—the Buddha connected it with a skillful energy. Often we equate energy and effort, and sometimes we speak about them as synonymous. The Buddha actually distinguished them a little bit. In one teaching he said that the faculty of energy—which is the faculty James talked about at the very beginning of the retreat, when he spoke about the five faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom—is the energy that supports our practice. It's the energy that guides us in the direction of continuing, of keeping on with the path. And the Buddha said that this spiritual faculty of energy is the energy that results from making wise effort. That's interesting. He says that energy results from effort.

We don't usually think of it that way. We normally think of needing to use energy to make effort. And we do have to have some measure of energy. We have energy, actually—the energy of life. There's energy in our bodies. Just because we're sitting here alive, that energy can be harnessed in the direction of wise effort. And then that wise effort begins to create this wholesome energy.

This is a beautiful thing, actually. The way we normally think about energy and effort is that making effort uses up energy—that when we make effort, we end up with less energy. And the Buddha says, no. When we make wise effort, we end up with wise energy. I told this to one of my daily life practice meetings, and somebody said, "It's green energy!" So wise effort leads to skillful energy.

There are some other supports for skillful energy that I'd like to briefly point to. Energy is actually in quite a few of the Buddhist lists. I mentioned the list that James talked about: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom. In that list, faith precedes energy. So this is another pointer for wise effort or wise energy. When there's a sense of trust, of confidence, of faith, that can bring a lot of energy to our system. That's another support for skillful energy.

Sometimes we can tap into this by reflecting on the ways the practice has benefited us, reflecting on our appreciation for the Buddha, reflecting on our appreciation for our community. This kind of reflection on the Triple Gem—the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha—can support faith, which can bring some energy into our system that we can harness for our practice.

In another list, the Seven Factors of Awakening, what precedes energy is investigation. Another clue for us. And this one I like to reflect on. Investigation is akin to or connected with the quality of curiosity and interest. When we are interested in what's happening—and we've been encouraging this, to be curious about what's happening, to be interested in what's happening—when we can tap into interest and curiosity, there's a natural arising of energy there. Especially when that curiosity is like, "What's this? What's this human experience of whatever this thing is that's happening right now?" That leads to skillful energy and brings a kind of natural energy into our system.

So as energy develops in our practice, we can then reapply it back to the practice. And yet it's helpful in our exploration of energy to begin to look at whether it's balanced. This is another aspect of the teaching on applying energy and effort that the Buddha really pointed to—that the energy needs to be balanced.

He used the analogy of tuning a lute, a guitar-like instrument. He asked one of his followers, "Did you play the lute when you were a lay person?" And that follower said, "Yes, I did." And the Buddha said, "Well, what happened when the string on the lute was too loose? Did it make beautiful music?" "No." "Well, what if the string was too tight?" "Well, then the string broke." "So you need to tune that string just right to make the music." He said, likewise with our practice, the energy has to be balanced and tuned. Too much energy we can often recognize because there's often restlessness in our system. Too little energy often results in sloth and torpor, dullness, sleepiness, drowsiness.

Sometimes I found that when exploring energy, exploring these imbalanced states of energy, it was actually supportive for me to recognize it simply as an imbalance of energy.

For instance, during one long stretch of my practice—a couple of years—sloth and torpor were a huge part of my experience, and I just had to learn how to work with it. I really had to get to explore it. One thing I began recognizing was that I had so many attitudes and opinions about this dull mind. I would hear myself saying, "This mind is way too dull to pay attention." And yet, at some point, I noticed: "Oh, it's too dull"—wait, seeing is happening. Hearing is happening. Okay, I guess there's mindfulness going on.

What I recognized is that in the very acknowledging of that state as "dull," there was already an attitude of aversion. When I started acknowledging it differently, recognizing "Oh, this is a low energy state," it made the acknowledgment more neutral. This can be useful for us sometimes in exploring those states of high or low energy—rather than attributing the hindrance to them, which can have a slight flavor of aversion, as it did in my case. "Okay, this is a high energy state. Can I be with high energy right now? Yeah, I can do that."

Recognizing that high energy, one way to balance it is through mindfulness. One way to balance low energy is also through mindfulness. There are times, as we've talked about, when there are strategies—useful strategies—to bring up the energy when it's low or to bring down the energy when it's high. But I'd encourage you to explore the possibility of mindfulness first.

Before standing up or taking a brisk walk or opening your eyes: "Oh, low energy, that's what's happening. Can I know that?" Yeah, I actually can know that pretty clearly. Right there, that acknowledgment, that mindful recognition of low energy—it's like it dials up the energy just enough to meet that experience. That's a way of increasing energy. That's the curiosity of "What is this low energy?"

In exploring this balance of energy, one of the keys is how much effort we make. Wise effort leads to skillful energy, and so the way we make our effort supports a balanced energy. Often when we're making effort—for instance, when we sit down at the beginning of a sitting—we may have the idea, "Okay, I'm sitting down, it's a forty-five minute sitting, I am going to be mindful for the whole thing." I certainly did this. It's like I picked up the entire forty-five minutes in that first second and tried to muster the energy to be there for the whole sitting in that first moment. And it doesn't work that way.

Right now, how hard is it to know hearing is happening of my voice? How hard is it to know the sensation of your hands? Just check in with the sensations of your hands. How about the contact of your hips against the chair or cushion or bench? How about a breath? Usually that is not too hard. In a moment, when I mention each of those areas, often it's right there. It didn't actually take too much effort to do that.

A moment of mindfulness takes a very, very small amount of energy, of effort. What's harder is to sustain it over time, to keep going with it. And it's often helpful, rather than thinking about picking up the whole forty-five minutes at once, to do it in small chunks.

Right now, notice an in-breath. And how about an out-breath? Just enough effort. How about enough effort for another in-breath? And just enough effort for another out-breath. Another in-breath. Another out-breath.

Often there's not a feeling of that taking a lot of effort. And so—small, small efforts over and over and over. Often the "over and over and over" piece is where our mind picks up and goes, "Oh..." And if we can, just enough effort for this half a breath. Just enough effort in the walking, for instance.

I would do this in walking when my mind was really scattered. I'd be doing walking maybe outside and I'd pick something on the ground, a leaf that's just three feet away. Can I be mindful till I get to that leaf? Yeah, made it.

How about that crack? Okay, I made it. How about that? So just picking up a small amount to try to be mindful for, and then doing it again and again and again. The light touch over and over.

As we do that light touch of effort over and over, a momentum tends to build. We begin to get the sense of not needing to push so hard—we can maybe go out six feet or ten feet. It's like the mindfulness seems to carry us.

There's an analogy I like to use for this kind of effort. The little scooters that kids ride, the kick scooters—they have a platform that's low on the ground, two skinny wheels, and you have to balance on this little platform and tap the ground to get the scooter to go. At the beginning, you have to tap quite frequently. You don't have to tap really hard to get going, but just tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap. Momentum builds, and then you begin to get a sense of that momentum, and you're riding the scooter for a little while. You don't have to tap for a little while. You get a feeling for when the scooter begins to get a little wobbly. Put your foot down, tap again to balance it out. Then you ride some more.

Mindfulness is kind of like that. We do the little bit of effort, just like tap, tap, tap—just enough for half a breath, half a breath. And then we begin to get a sense of the momentum of the mindfulness, recognizing the mindfulness as we talked about a few days ago. We recognize that we don't have to remind ourselves as frequently. And then we begin to get familiar with what it feels like for that mindfulness to get wobbly, and we reconnect again, remind ourselves—right, two steps out, three steps out. A light touch over and over. This is the way effort can build momentum skillfully and not lead to contraction in the mind.

Sometimes I also ask myself—because if you tend to over-effort, this is a good question to ask yourself—how little effort do I need to be mindful right now? Just backing off. It's like, oh, I don't need to make that much. Okay, a little bit less. Oh wow, still mindful without trying so hard. How about a little bit less? Wow, still mindful. Oh, gone. Okay, maybe a little more than that. Just beginning to check in for how much effort is useful right now.

Over time, this momentum of effort, skillful energy, begins to build. The mindfulness goes along with that. And we have wise mindfulness with a kind of continuity that feels more effortless. It doesn't feel like we're

having to do it so much anymore. My teacher Sayadaw U Tejaniya says this isn't that there's no effort being made, but it is the Dharma making the effort then. He distinguishes between Dharma effort, Dharma energy, and personal energy. When do we need to actually engage with our sense of making the effort? And when can we kind of settle back and the Dharma begins to make the effort? It feels effortless, but the wisdom and the Dharma are doing the work for us.

And so we cultivate the conditions for skillful effort, for recognizing our experience, for the continuity of mindfulness. Really, wise effort is a real support for this continuity of mindfulness. And that continuity of mindfulness creates the conditions for freedom, for release, for wisdom to grow.

And yet we have to let go of expecting our effort to yield results on our timetable. On one long retreat, I was listening to a talk by Kamala Masters, who was telling a story about an experience, a teaching she had from her teacher Munindraji. She was talking about her impatience for getting results. And his response was just, "When the fruit is ripe, it will fall from the tree."

That image for me became a really beautiful reflection. An apple on a tree—it looks red perhaps, it looks ripe. And yet you tug on it and it's not coming off. It's not sweetened on the inside yet.

We cannot make that apple ripen. It ripens in its own time. We can support the tree by creating the conditions—nourishing it, giving it water and food and light, making sure the bugs don't eat it up. We can take care of the tree. We cannot make the fruit ripen. It has its own time. And even if it looks ripe, it's still got some sweetening to do on the inside.

Sometimes it feels like that in practice. Surely, *surely* there must be some release just moments away. But no. When the fruit is ripe, it will fall from the tree.

So we make the effort, and we let go. In the list of *pāramīs*, I think it's interesting that patience follows energy.

Let's sit for a moment.

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